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ABSTRACT

Family influence is an important force in preparing youth for their roles as workers. Family background factors found to be associated with career development include parents' socioeconomic status, their educational level, biogenetic factors, and family income. Family processes of interaction, communication, and behavior influence what the child learns about work and work experiences. Attitudes about school and work, educational and career goals and aspirations, and values have a long-term impact on a youth's career choices, decisions, and plans. Parents from different groups have different types of influence on the educational and occupational decisions of both boys and girls in the family. Mexican American parents want more education for their children than the children may want. Although they are focused on the role of continuing education in the career development process, Korean parents focus on career selection. Their strong desire is for their children to be professionals and earn money and prestige. Types of parental involvement in adolescents' career development are positive involvement, noninvolvement, and negative involvement. The greatest anxiety adolescents feel about their career decisions is in response to parents' negative involvement. Structuring parental involvement in adolescent career development is an important element of a school's career counseling. Counselors should work directly with parents and provide information and support. (Contains 10 references.) (YLB)

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ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

Family Role in Career Development

by Bettina A. Lankard

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Family influence is an important force in preparing youth for their roles as workers. Young people form many of their attitudes about work and careers as a result of interactions with the family. Family background provides the basis from which their career planning and decision making evolve. However, within each family, the level of involvement can vary, offering both positive and negative influences. This *Digest* examines the research on family influences on career development and describes implications for practice.

The Influence of Family Background

"Family background factors found to be associated with career development include parents' socioeconomic status (SES), their educational level, and biogenetic factors such as physical size, gender, ability, and temperament" (Penick and Jepsen 1992, p. 208). In a study of the influences on adolescents' vocational development reported by Mortimer et al. (1992), the variable that had the most effect on educational plans and occupational aspirations was parental education.

Mortimer et al. also report that parents with postsecondary education tend to pass along its importance to their children—a finding supported by other studies. Montgomery (1992) notes that females talented in math viewed their career choices as reflective of interests that stemmed from early family influence and educational opportunities. Marso and Pigge (1994) found that the presence of teachers in the family was a significant factor influencing teacher candidates' decisions to teach. DeRidder (1990), however, points out that lower levels of parent education can retard adolescents' career development. "Being born to parents with limited education and income reduces the likelihood of going to college or achieving a professional occupational goal and essentially predetermines the child's likely vocational choice" (p. 4).

Family income is another aspect of family background that influences the career development of youth, especially for girls (Mortimer et al. 1992). One reason for this may be that families with limited economic resources tend to direct them first to the males of the family, giving less hope and encouragement for further education to the daughters in the family. Also, some parents—especially working class or lower-income parents—may hold values that place girls in the homemaker role and reflect less emphasis on occupational preparation (ibid.). Given this disposition, it is understandable that the self-efficacy of girls with respect to career opportunities is linked to the economic support they can expect to receive from their parents.

The Influence of Family Processes

Although much of the research on the role of family in vocational and career development has focused on family background, the investigation of family processes viewed in relation to life roles offers additional insight into the influences of the family. Family processes of interaction, communication, and behavior influence what the child learns about work and work experiences. Attitudes about school and work, educational and career goals and aspirations, and values have a long-term impact on a youth's career choices, decisions, and plans. "Parents as daily models provide cultural standards, attitudes, and expectations and, in many ways, determine the eventual adequacy of self-acceptance and confidence, of social skills and of sex roles. The attitudes and behaviors of parents while working or discussing their work is what the children respond to and learn" (DeRidder 1990, p. 3).

Through the process of educating their children about life roles, parents can influence the employability skills and values that children subsequently adopt. Grinstad and Way (1993) report one mother's message to her daughter on the theme of becoming self-sufficient:

> You have to have a way to take care of your family. And she (her mother) says you cannot depend on a man. And she said you have to think about number one and that's you. And she said how are you going to make a living, how are you going to support your children, if you don't have some kind of training. (p. 50)

The interaction of many individual variables in family process is a significant factor to consider in studying family influence on career development. Middleton and Loughead (1993) suggest that adolescents' career aspirations be examined from an interactionist perspective rather than a unilateral process of influence, "focusing on the context and situations in which adolescents' career development occurs" (p. 163).

Ethnic Minority Parents and Career Development

Parents from certain minority groups have a great influence on the educational and occupational decisions of both boys and girls in the family. Two very different examples are Mexican American and Korean parents. Clayton et al. (1993) found that "Mexican American parents want more education for their children than their children want for themselves" (p. 4). This is especially significant from a population that typically is undereducated and has high unemployment and dropout rates and low occupational status (ibid.).

Although the aspirations Mexican American parents hold for their children may be high, continuing education is often unavailable due to lack of funds. In fact, "50 percent of the 8th and 12th graders and 55 percent of the community college students" in Clayton et al.'s (1992) study cited lack of funds as a primary factor in their plans for continuing education (p. 36). Mexican American parents should be made aware of the availability of financial aid that could support their children's continuing education.

Whereas Mexican American parents are focused on the role of continuing education in the career development process, Korean parents focus on career selection. "The strong desire of Korean immigrants for their children to be professionals and earn money and prestige is conveyed either in a rather demanding form or in a more subtle form that is just as clear" (Kim 1993, p. 237). The pressure to choose certain careers is often initiated when the child is quite young. Stories by college students of Korean descent, reported by Kim, confirm that their career choices both "explicitly and implicitly reflect the cultural model of success their parents share" (p. 239).

One student described how, when he was still young, his father announced at a potluck dinner that "Tim will be a lawyer and Don will be a doctor." Another student described how her father introduced each member of their family to his guests by stating what career each would pursue before any of them had made a career choice: "Ron, the future doctor; Ben, who will

be an engineer before you know it, and Carrie, who is going into business" (p. 239). "As he announces the children's career plans proudly in public and as the guests at the party recognize and envy his success, the Korean immigrants' cultural model of success is also recognized, reinforced, and transmitted" (ibid.). As happens in other cultures, Korean parents distinguish between boys and girls in the careers they assign to their children. "Girls can choose careers that are considered less stressful and less demanding and that have more flexible schedules so that they can combine families with careers" (p. 241).

Negative Effects of Parental Influence

Middleton and Loughead (1993) present three categories to describe types of parental involvement in adolescents' career development: (1) positive involvement, (2) noninvolvement, and (3) negative involvement. The greatest anxiety adolescents feel about their career decisions or exploration, quite understandably, is in response to parents' negative involvement.

Parents in the "negative involvement" category are often controlling and domineering in their interactions with their children. The children of such parents often pursue the careers selected by their parents rather than those they desire so as not to disappoint their parents or go against their wishes. Likewise, they feel a strong sense of frustration and guilt when they do not meet their parents' expectations.

The burden of following a parent's narrowly defined expectations of success has resulted in "mental health problems, estranged parent-child relationships, or in socially delinquent behaviors" (ibid., p. 243). Penick and Jepsen (1992) note that "adolescents from enmeshed families may have difficulty mastering career development tasks because they are unable to distinguish their own from parental goals and expectations" (p. 220). Disengagement of family and adolescents has similarly negative effects. "Adolescents from disengaged families may lack familial support and interaction, resulting in limits on self-knowledge and task orientation that interferes with mastery of career development tasks" (ibid.).

Implications for Practice

Structuring or guiding parental involvement in adolescent career development is increasingly seen as an important element of a school's career counseling. "Previous research has suggested that educational institutions are not the only source of learning related to occupational choice and enactments in this society. It has been found that the family plays in important role in the transmission of values such as independence, ambition, career orientation and actual career choice" (Grinstad and Way 1993, p. 67).

DeRidder (1990) suggests that counselors work directly with parents, collaborating with them and helping them to improve their effectiveness in guiding their children. He encourages parents not only to communicate about work and careers with their children, but to show faith in their children's abilities to be successful, providing them with encouragement and information. "They should help their children learn that basic work attitudes of promptness, respect, responsibility, and interest in schoolwork are expected both at home and at school" (ibid., p. 4).

Career development professionals can help parents by providing them with information and support. Middleton and Loughead (1993) recommend that counselors meet with parents "individually or collectively to disseminate information on how to facilitate their adolescents' career development and familiarize them with career resource materials" (p. 166).

Within the school setting, Grimstad and Way (1993) suggest that "vocational education at all levels should be placed within a contextual framework where the work of the world and the work of the family are integrated and explored simultaneously" (p. 67). By increasing communication between home and school regarding career development, it is possible that the positive aspects of family influence can be enhanced and the negative aspects can be offset, improving the career development outcomes of the workers of the future.

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